



COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5200

March 1, 2018

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INDIAN, INSULAR, AND ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATION

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Re: Federal Assistance for Cyclone Gita damages in American Samoa

Dear Mr. President,

Pago Pago, American Samoa was again ranked #1 out of 885 Army Recruiting Stations in America in 2017 and broke the Army record for early recruiting among high school students. These Veterans who have gladly served America for generations and these future high school soldier recruits, their families and all other American Samoans need your help now more than ever in the wake of the flood and wind damage recently caused by Cyclone Gita.

As you are aware, American Samoa Governor Lolo M. Moliga made a request to your Administration this week, which I fully support, to declare a Major Disaster for the U.S. Territory of American Samoa as a result of Cyclone Gita and additional tropical monsoon weather that severely damaged public and private infrastructure, homes, businesses, and family farms during the period February 7 thru February 12, 2018.

American Samoa is currently under a Presidential emergency declaration allowing limited direct federal assistance to the local American Samoan government.

Thank you Mr. President for this swift initial declaration of an emergency in American Samoa. It has triggered the initial Federal response through FEMA and other supporting agencies. I urge your Administration to also swiftly approve our Governor's request as well for a major disaster declaration in order to bring the full breadth of available assistance under law to the people of American Samoa as soon as possible.

The initial joint federal and local government's post-Gita damage assessments of individual homes and public infrastructure have been completed. They are included in the Governor's submitted request for a major disaster declaration for federal assistance which I have also enclosed.

Furthermore, I wanted to highlight some of NASA's Global Precipitation Measurement (GPM) data to bring light to the immense force of this storm and the destruction to thousands of people's homes and crops. The GPM's mission is an international network of satellites that provide the next-generation global observations of rain and snow.

During Cyclone Gita, rainfall in the American Samoa area was measured by GPM's radar falling at a rate of over 2.5 inches per hour. The heaviest rainfall was found in bands wrapping around the eastern side of Gita. *Rain in one of these downpours fell at a rate of greater than an astounding 8.8 inches per hour!* Over 20 inches of rain accompanied Gita's winds in just a few days and had winds estimated at over 104 mph. Hurricane Maria by comparison similarly inundated Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands' rain totals of 10 to over 20 inches were common along Maria's track.

American Samoans are also people of deep faith. Many religious buildings were damaged and various Church groups are sheltering many of the displaced persons and are also in need of assistance and volunteering to assist local and Federal relief aid efforts to which we owe them a tremendous gratitude and all the assistance we can provide. Cyclone Gita also severely damaged our neighboring islands in Samoa and Tonga which is impeding inter island commerce regionally. As one media report identified The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints' service center—the faith's hub for construction, humanitarian and other temporal affairs efforts in Samoa and American Samoa—was flooded and its septic tank breached. Fouled water supplies have also been reported in other locations and over 2 dozen structures of all Faiths have been damaged in American Samoa alone.

Farm and Fish Damage and Restoration

American Samoan small farms, fisheries and other businesses need your help Mr. President.

Challenges exist as to the ability of local housing and farms to rapidly recover from the floods and winds of Cyclone Gita which displaced thousands estimating displacement of the local population and ruined even more local crops. The primary crops of taro, breadfruit, banana and other crops are severely damaged for an island where subsistence farming is a key economic survival tool. This is in addition to an already high unemployment rate of nearly 15% has spiked as well in the ensuing weeks.

Please keep in mind that small farms and fishing are the backbone of the economy in American Samoa where nearly 60% of all farms are between 1-7 acres—the Gita storm will severely impact food security in American Samoa over the next year as crops need to be reestablished. The statistics collected in the USDA census represent all places in American Samoa with agricultural operations during the 2008 calendar year qualifying as farms. The farm definition was any place that raised or produced any agricultural products for sale or home consumption. The 2008 Census of Agriculture found approximately sixty percent of all households in American Samoa fit this definition. Commercial farms are defined as those with sales of just \$100 or more, and noncommercial farms are those with less than \$100 in sales.

Accordingly, I ask that your assistance in working with Governor Lolo, Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and Small Business Administrator Linda McMahon to insure all direct, indirect loan and other assistance is made available as soon as possible under all programs for individuals, small businesses, small and large farmers, individual fishermen and commercial fisheries operations and other local economic enterprises to help us quickly recover our private sector economy.

In addition to supporting our requests with Congressional Appropriators, I also wholeheartedly urge you Mr. President to do that which you can do, immediately and independently of Congress, to speedily adopt Secretary Zinke's recommendation to manage fishing in the Pacific Remote Island Monuments. We lost our largest cannery and 3000 jobs due to past misguided fishing policies. Our remaining cannery and fishing fleet are struggling with the cannery being closed 8 of the last 20 weeks due to lack of fish supply from bad trade deals and fisheries management policies. You can largely correct this by adopting Secretary Zinke's recommendation that is pending at the White House.

We also need you to restore our purse seiners access to the high seas. Give us fish Mr. President, and that will sustain American Samoa, create revenue for our government operations, provide jobs and limit our need for long term federal assistance.

The Governor's initial report is also enclosed. Much of his government administration building infrastructure was damaged along with nearly one million in combined damage to our sole hospital and community college, core facilities for the public. Accordingly, I also ask that the White House working with Governor Lolo and the Secretary of Interior to support my request to Congressional Appropriators to fully fund and increase the American Samoan Operations budget to insure Governor Lolo's Administration has sufficient resources to meet the recovery needs of everyone in American Samoa during this crisis and its recovery over the course of the next year.

Waive the Local FEMA Match Requirement

Federal regulations require FEMA to enter into cost-sharing agreements for recovery programs. I am requesting that your Administration and Secretary of Homeland Security support a full waiver, or set the federal cost-share at 100%, for any disaster aid, emergency repairs and/or restoration to American Samoa.

It is necessary to waive the match as American Samoa has been in a recession for over 10 years and has limited access to the capital markets and an unemployment rate of nearly 15% prior to Cyclone Gita. Due to American Samoa's balanced budget requirement with current debt holders I emphasize the importance of waiving the required local match as it is unlikely that American Samoa will be able to meet the requisite match and a cost-sharing requirement will cause long delays in providing the necessary relief for 60,000 of its citizens. There is precedent for reductions to 0%-10%.

Accordingly, I also ask you to waive local cost sharing requirement and set the federal cost share at 100 percent for Public Assistance grants administered by FEMA that pertain to

American Samoa. I make this request as American Samoa faces serious financial limitations due to a number of factors: it is a population of slightly less than 60000, with nearly 55% below the poverty line, an unemployment rate of 15% and a workforce of less than 20000 with only one major employer, a tuna cannery employing about 2500 people.

Medicaid Relief

The American Samoan Government is particularly burdened now more than ever by the caps on Medicaid reimbursements and matching requirements of nearly 50% and ask for a temporary waiver of those matching funds. In the ACA, American Samoa was granted an additional pot of money in which we would be able to draw from; due to the lack of medical services in American Samoa, it has been difficult drawing down this fund. By granting the waiver and allowing American Samoa to draw down from this fund without having to meet the matching requirements, would greatly alleviate the strain on local services. American Samoa only has one hospital, and many residents, including many Veterans, need to travel to Hawai'i 2,500 miles away to receive basic medical care. Significant renovations or total replacement of our sole hospital is an emergency need.

Again, thank you and all of your Administration for your swift action and ongoing concern for everyone in American Samoa. I look forward to working with you, your Administration, Governor Lolo and my Congressional colleagues to aid a speedy recovery for all in American Samoa. God Bless you, America and American Samoa.

Sincerely,



Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen
Member of Congress

Cc:

Lolo M. Moliga – *Governor of American Samoa U.S. Territory*

Brock Long – *Director of FEMA*

Robert J. Fenton, Jr – *FEMA Region IX Administrator*

Alex Azar – *Department of Health and Human Services Secretary*

Ryan Zinke – *Department of Interior Secretary*

Douglas Domenech – *Department of Interior Assistant Secretary for Insular Affairs*

House of Representatives:

Paul D. Ryan – *Speaker of the House*

Kevin McCarthy – *Majority Leader*

Nancy Pelosi – *Democratic Leader*

Rodney P. Frelinghuysen – *Committee on Appropriations Chairman*

Nita M. Lowey – *Committee on Appropriations Ranking Member*

Ken Calvert – *Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Chairman*

Betty McCollum – *Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Ranking Member*

Tom Cole – *Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Chairman*

Rosa L. DeLauro – *Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Ranking Member*

Greg Walden – *Committee on Energy and Commerce Chairman*

Frank Pallone – *Committee on Energy and Commerce Ranking Member*

Rob Bishop – *Committee on Natural Resources Committee Chairman*

Raul M. Grijalva – *Committee on Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member*

Senate:

Mitch McConnell – *Majority Leader and Committee on Appropriations Chairman*

Charles E. Schumer – *Democratic Leader*

Thad Cochran – *Committee on Appropriations Chairman*

Patrick Leahy – *Committee on Appropriations Ranking Member*

Tom Udall – *Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Ranking Member*

Roy Blunt – *Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Chairman*

Patty Murray – *Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Ranking Member*

Lisa Murkowski – *Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Chairman*

Maria Cantwell – *Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Ranking Member*

Orrin G. Hatch – *Committee on Finance Chairman*

Ron Wyden – *Committee on Finance Ranking Member*